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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001816

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GODR OFFICIALS ON STATUS OF NEW
DOMINICAN PASSPORT AND NEW PASSPORT ANTI-FRAUD UNIT

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 006970

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (U) SUMMARY: GODR is still on track to produce ICAO compliant passport in April. GODR Passport Office has established new Anti-Fraud Unit. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On March 9, 2004 Consul General and FPM met with Director of GODR Passport Office, Mr. Elias Wessin Chavez. Purpose of the meeting was to find out the status of a proposed ICAO compliant Dominican passport. Reftel stated that new Dominican passport was expected to be ready by April, 2004.

3. (U) Chavez is holding to the original deadline of April, at which time he said that at least the Central Passport Office in Santo Domingo would be producing the new Dominican passport. On the day of our meeting, Chavez reported that there were some problems in Dominican Customs with release of the passport printing hardware shipped from Germany. Once it is released, he said, it will be installed in all twelve passport agencies, which are already networked. Passport authorization, however, will only be done by the Central Passport Office in Santo Domingo. The only serious infrastructure problem Chavez envisions is the lack of dependability of electricity. He has planned on buying generators for each office.

4. (U) Chavez mentioned that this first year is considered a transition phase after which the new operation will be replicated for official and diplomatic passports, and Dominican visas responsibility for which comes under the Office of Consular Affairs, headed by Ambassador Dulce Rosario de la Maza.

5. (U) Chavez emphasized that not only will the GODR be producing a new ICAO compliant passport, it will be implementing a new approach to the passport application, adjudication, and issuance process. He said that he did not want the passport office to be seen as a "passport factory" where you can get a passport as long as you have paid your money. Instead, he said that the process will be under more control and that applicants will have to prove their eligibility for a passport. He is, therefore, implementing the following anti-fraud measures:

(1) Payment for passports will be through the Banco de Reservas and applicants will bring their payment receipts to the passport office. This is to separate the handling of cash from the actual passport adjudication and issuance process. (2) Burning all the blank old Dominican passport books that will become obsolete with the issuance of the new passport.

Most important, however, was Chavez's announcement the week previous to our meeting that he had established a Passport Office Anti-Fraud Unit with fraud prevention as its mission. This unit is staffed by both lawyers and police officers. The latter bring technical expertise in fraud practices. Chavez stated that they have already submitted thirty-five cases of fraud to the justice system. The FPM and FPU staff had been invited the week before to attend an anti-fraud training workshop sponsored on four consecutive Saturdays for GODR Passport Office employees country-wide. FPM and staff attended the inauguration of the workshop on March 6. There were more than 100 participants from the entire country and they displayed a high degree of interest and enthusiasm for the concept of "fraud prevention".

During our meeting, Chavez requested training from the Consulate to which we agreed. He also hinted at a request for forensic lab equipment to which we did not commit. He promised to give us samples of the new Dominican passport as soon as they are ready.

16. (U) Dominican presidential elections are to take place on May 16, 2004. When we asked Chavez what would happen to his efforts after that date, he responded that no matter who followed him, he believed that this new passport system would survive since it would be something that could really not be dismantled easily. He also mentioned that he had been invited to the ICAO Conference on May 17, 2004 but because of the elections was unsure whether he would attend.

17. (U) Embassy will continue to follow the progress of the new Dominican passport and report as developments occur.

HERTELL